

Employee Assistance Program

1-800-852-3345, Ext. 4336 or 271-4336

Helping Children Cope With Change

Routines: A Central Role

Have you ever noticed just how often a child can sing the same song and play the same game over and over? How they insist on "following the rules" or receiving that "one last kiss before bedtime"? These routines are seasonal too: we go to Grandmother's every summer; we open the presents after birthday dinner. Children's various routines foster patterns which become extremely important to their sense of security and well-being. Routines and rituals give order and predictability to life. A change in routine may make a child feel confused, afraid, or even hostile. This doesn't mean children don't like to be spontaneous

Talk It Out Ahead of Time

Children are very adaptable to change, especially when they are prepared. Today more families are choosing to communicate with small children when big changes are coming such as a new sibling, moving, or having an elderly parent move in. When children feel entrusted with this kind of information, they are better able to retain their sense of security, which allows you to create a smoother transition for the whole family. Try to give a child as much time as possible to get used to the new change, but anticipate some rough spots. Encourage kids to ask questions, voice concerns, and visualize the changes. It may be very helpful if you can demonstrate the change. If your daughter is going to go to a new school this fall, for example, take her there. Let her play on the playground and walk through the building. This will give her something tangible to identify with and will help take the uncertainty and fear out of the new situation.

Even the Little Things

Children can become upset at slight changes as well. To avoid anxiety for your kids, and frustration for you, just let them know about a change as soon as you do. If you are unable to go to your regularly scheduled "library day" this week, try to give your child an alternative, so expectations are still met. Perhaps your sitter could go with your child to the library instead. The child may even welcome this new adventure.